



**County of Los Angeles**  
**DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

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August 3, 2017

To: Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, Chairman  
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From: Brandon T. Nichols, Acting Director  
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**RESPONSE TO THE MAY 9, 2017 BOARD MOTION (ITEM NO. 2) INTRODUCED BY  
SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS REGARDING THE JUNE 3, 2017  
RESOURCE FAMILY RECRUITMENT CONVENING**

On May 9, 2017, your Board instructed the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS or the Department) to use up to \$30,000 from the Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention and Support award to match Southern California Grantmakers' investment to support the June 3, 2017 Resource Family Recruitment Convening event. In addition, DCFS and the Center for Strategic Public-Private Partnerships (the Center) were instructed to develop target outcomes and metrics for the event; and to report back to the Board in 60 days on event outcomes and lessons learned that can be applied to future convenings throughout the County.

**Executive Summary**

Los Angeles County currently does not have sufficient resource families to meet the needs of children placed in out-of-home care. The Resource Family Recruitment "Fostering Home" event offered a means to address this crisis. Many potential resource families may not pursue the approval process because the numerous requirements are cumbersome and often hard to navigate. The *Fostering Home* event offered a new vision for recruitment, focused on community, support, and appreciation for those interested in becoming a resource family. The event offered guests the opportunity to attend an orientation session, get a health and TB screening, complete a live scan (criminal clearance), receive paperwork assistance, and ask DCFS and participating Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) any and all questions about the approval process. The intention for this event was to serve as a replicable model for others around the County.

*"To Enrich Lives Through Effective and Caring Service"*

For this inaugural event, the focus was on targeted outreach to the faith community in South Los Angeles, connecting with established networks to help recruit and bring families to the event, while introducing the new Resource Family Approval (RFA) process to churches not connected to the Department. In addition to faith-based outreach, families in various stages of the resource parent approval process with FFAs and DCFS were invited to attend to obtain assistance in the completion of their approval process. South Los Angeles was selected as the initial location as the need for new resource families is particularly urgent and critical in this community.

The *Fostering Home* event met multiple goals:

1. Provided an opportunity to help bring in new resource families, including connecting with relatives.
2. Increased awareness of the need for more resource families and highlighted volunteer opportunities for people who may not be able to foster a child, but want to help. This was especially relevant for the faith-based community, as faith communities have a model of supporting each other in bringing a child into a home of a congregant and then having other members of the congregation support that family through things like respite care, shopping, tutoring etc.
3. Allowed DCFS to provide information to the community about the new RFA requirements.
4. Allowed DCFS to establish relationships with new churches and strengthen relationships with existing churches, while also bringing together community based organizations in South Los Angeles.
5. Created a model for on-going replication across the County.

#### **Resource Family Recruitment “Fostering Home” Event**

As a result of the CCR, the number of newly approved resource family homes must be increased by 25 percent annually to address the existing shortfall and accommodate attrition rates. As a result, the recruitment of new resource families is a top priority. The Department has a history of engaging with the faith community, but the Department was interested in strengthening this engagement and the new RFA process offered an opportunity to explore more targeted and dedicated outreach.

The Department and the Center together developed the concept of this one-stop shop as an opportunity to achieve that goal. Both believed it was an ideal public-private partnership. The Center approached philanthropy and both the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation and the Pritzker Foster Care Initiative each invested \$15,000 in support of the “one-stop shop” *Fostering Home* concept.

With this \$30,000 investment, an outside consultant, Nancy Harris, Executive Director of the Holman Community Development Corporation, was hired to help with event coordination and management, as well as outreach to the faith community.

In the early stages of coordinating the event, the consultant focused on three components: assembling an advisory committee to assist with event design and planning, securing a venue, and engaging in outreach with the faith community.

#### Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee consisted of Department leadership, Center staff, philanthropic partners, a faith community representative and a community based partner organization. The diversity of this Advisory Committee – County, faith, private philanthropy, and community – was key to the success of the event. Each brought different perspectives to the table and the combination of this thinking helped to elevate the event.

In addition to the Advisory Committee, a smaller workgroup, the Planning Committee, was also formed. The Planning Committee consisted of the consultant, key Department staff (subject matter experts) who provides direct services in SPA 6, community partners, and Center staff. The Planning Committee met weekly and completed all ground work and details of and for the event. This team was responsible for all key elements of event including program determination and details, resource fair coordination, volunteer coordination, budget and resource coordination, venue coordination, survey, evaluation, and post event follow-up.

#### Venue Selection

As this event was focused on recruiting families from the faith community, holding it at one of the larger churches in South Los Angeles was ideal. The consultant looked at a number of possible sites before selecting the Center of Hope Church in Inglewood. The Center of Hope was an ideal location due to the space for breakout sessions, child care, and ease of parking and the accessibility of the venue. Additionally, as it turned out, the Church's Pastor, Jeremy Dixon and his wife Adrienne are foster parents themselves, and were thrilled to host this unique event at the Church. Pastor and Mrs. Dixon assisted with outreach efforts, sharing their story with various members of the faith leader community, and as panel participants at the event.

#### Faith Community Outreach

The consultant began reaching out to the faith community in South Los Angeles almost as soon as she was engaged. She made calls and sent emails to faith leaders with whom she was connected to garner interest in the event. She told them about the foster care crisis and need, educated them on how to help, and gained commitments to recruit families to the event. Her formal outreach through "Faith Leader Luncheons" began three months prior to the event. These luncheons were held at Holman United Methodist Church and included faith leaders of many denominations, faith traditions,

and nationalities. The structure included a welcome by the host church Pastor, explanation of the June 3<sup>rd</sup> event (done by a representative from the Center), the statement of the need and current issues from a Department representative, a personal story from a Foster Family/Parent and the "ask" delivered by the consultant. The "ask" also included a request to Pastors to invite the consultant to visit their churches personally to make an appeal directly to their congregations. The consultant personally visited four South Los Angeles churches.

The outreach efforts helped forge a stronger relationship between the Department, the faith community, and the community at large. The concept employed here proved to be successful. An average of 15 faith leaders attended two (2) luncheons. The luncheons provided an opportunity for the Department to engage with and answer critical questions from faith leaders. The warm introduction from a trusted leader in the community helped ensure that the Department was welcomed. For instance, through this introduction, Department staff was invited to accompany the consultant for a Sunday at City of Refuge, a large, high density church with 17,000 members. This visit alone resulted in engagement with over 50 church members and commitments from 35 individuals to attend the event. With more time and a few changes, the participation from the faith community can provide the recruitment, foster family, and youth support that is needed and lacking in the South Los Angeles Community.

In addition to the three focus areas, the Department and the Center worked to ensure the event's success through securing the matching \$30,000 launching a marketing campaign.

#### Marketing

While the faith outreach was essential, the Advisory Committee realized that additional marketing and event promotion were necessary to generate excitement and ensure a successful event. RaiseAChild, a non-profit with marketing and event planning agency with expertise in helping prospective foster families navigate the approval process was hired to assist with these efforts. RaiseAChild hosts successful recruitment events throughout Los Angeles County and the Advisory Committee felt their best practices would be successful here.

Prior to developing a promotional plan, RaiseAChild approached the project with two initial goals in mind: 1) to develop a more simplified message for and a more concise description of the event (*"Fostering Home, a new project designed to make the process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent easier and more inclusive for all families."*) and 2) to create a short descriptive handle or name for the event. RaiseAChild worked between the Department's Public Affairs Division, publicists, writers, graphic designers, programmers, and consultants to achieve these goals with the approvals of all event partners. As a result, RaiseAChild successfully developed a marketing campaign for the event consisting of:

- Logo
- Flyers
- Dedicated Phone Line
- Website with RSVP sign-up capabilities
- Coordinated Press Efforts with DCFS
- Social Media – Facebook and Twitter pages plus designed and promoted posts
- Digital Media – Google AdWords and various Community Calendar listings
- Radio – KJLH 102.3 FM and Univision's KTNQ & KRCD

These tools were designed with replication in mind. With the exception of the radio ads and social media buys, these tools can be used in future events.

In addition to helping design and market the event, RaiseAChild handled RSVPs, merging responses from the Department, the phone line, the website, and Church signups, to create one master list. RaiseAChild also reached out to those who had RSVP'd to remind them of the event just before it took place.

Throughout the planning process, it became clear how vital partnership would be for the event to be successful. The Department took the lead with this effort, bringing staff from several departments to the table, all of whom worked with the Planning Committee and partners to ensure the day's success. The mix of public, private, and community partners at the table allowed the Department to integrate into the community at a deep level. The matching investment funded a radio and social media advertisement campaign, as well as continued participant follow-up and tracking. The planning process allowed for new strategies and opportunities to explore a new approach to recruitment.

Partners for Children South LA secured the St. John's mobile van and provided health and TB screenings. Partners for Children South LA also provided child care for children ages four and up, allowing parents to truly engage in the orientation, resource fair, and breakout sessions. Finally, the faith partnerships formed were also essential in terms of recruitment and awareness—the event could not be successful without the buy-in and support of the Church leadership.

### **Event Details**

Both the Planning and Advisory Committees worked together to design the program and event format. The goal was to articulate the need for resource families and volunteers to all attendees in the general session and then allow individuals to follow the track that best fit them, i.e. family in process, new family, interested in volunteering, etc.

The program was designed to deliver information and inspiration, providing the resources and support necessary to begin the RFA process. This included general information on the foster care system and supports available (through the resource fair). The "why" and words from those directly impacted by the system (general session for all

guests) targeted sessions on specific topics (orientation, breakouts) and associated services necessary (live scan, mobile vans).

#### Resource Fair and "One-Stop Shop"

As part of the "one-stop shop" model, the *Fostering Home* event featured a Resource Fair. This Fair was open to all throughout the day. It demonstrated the supports available to and surrounding resource families and foster youth. The Advisory Committee began with suggested participants and organizations; the Planning Committee then refined and added to the existing list. Twenty eight organizations, including four County departments (Department of Public Social Services (DPSS), Department of Mental Health (DMH), Public Library, and the Department of Public Health (DPH)), participated in the fair, showing just how much support exists in the community for resource parents and foster children. The "Fair" offered more than just information. DPSS brought their mobile van to offer CalFresh sign ups, DMH offered referrals and support, and DCFS social workers helped people with paperwork. In their evaluations, guests commented on how useful the Fair was, and the valuable information it provided. Additionally, feedback from providers suggests that the providers found the event to be well attended, well organized, and worth their participation in the future.

In addition to the opportunities available at the Resource Fair, this event also included resources specifically designed to break down barriers to becoming a resource family. The event allowed participants to get a health and TB screenings onsite through the St. John's mobile van. Participants were also able to complete their live scan onsite through the Department, as well as submit an application and register for the pre-approval training.

#### General Session

The formal program began with a General Session for all attendees. The goal of this session was, as discussed earlier, to provide framing for the day and hear from foster families and former foster youth about the need and why those interested should continue or begin the RFA process.

#### Orientation

For the first time ever, The Department participated in a joint orientation, facilitated with two FFAs, Children's Bureau, and Penny Lane, giving attendees who decide to continue in the process more options and flexibility. The response and demand for the orientation indicated that offering an on-site orientation is a key element to these events and critical to their success going forward. This event tested the new concept of a joint FFA/DCFS orientation. While the orientation was successful in recruiting families, for future events, additional exploration on how to deliver information about the similarities and differences between DCFS/FFAs in a clearer, more streamlined manner is required.

### **Breakout Sessions**

For those not quite ready to attend orientation, two breakout sessions were offered. One focused on other ways to get involved with representatives from KidSave, DCFS, CASA, and Child Share presenting; the other was a continuation of the earlier panel discussion from the general information session, allowing for "Questions & Answers" with former foster youth and current foster parents.

### **Outcomes and Metrics**

The Department and the Center set a goal of 100 attendees, which the event not only met, but exceeded. Ultimately, there were 114 families that RSVP'd of which 70 attended. In addition, 72 families attended as "Walk-Ins". In total, 142 families attended the *Fostering Home* event.

Of those who attended, 65 individuals attended the joint on-site orientation. DCFS received applications from 40 families and the participating FFAs received 4 applications. DCFS processed live scans for 57 individuals and 25 families registered for DCFS' pre-approval training.

### **Lessons Learned**

The overwhelming response from participants and planners alike was that this model worked. Potential resource families felt valued and supported in the process. The Department was part of the community and welcomed there. Many participants and planners commented that this event had an "energy" that was different from anything that the Department had done before in recruiting families. Debriefs with planners after the event and reviews of evaluations suggest that this success can be attributed to diverse partners coming together, each bringing their strengths to create synergies that were different from what the Department alone could do. The success of the event was also attributed to offering multiple services, including orientation, health, TB screening, and live scan under one roof, under the theory that processing several RFA requirements in one place and on one day would expedite the RFA process.

#### ***Important to Start with Trusted Community Relationships***

The successful engagement of the South Los Angeles faith-based community is the direct result of building on the trusted relationship of the outside consultant. The consultant conducted the initial outreach in the community as someone with established connections and credibility. The consultant, as a member of the South Los Angeles faith community, leveraged her own personal connections to get leaders interested and invested in the event. This warm introduction to the Department built trust with faith leaders that then resulted in engagement with their congregations and the community. The consultant's efforts resulted in 49 attendees at the event and outreach to 17 area churches.

As a member of the community, the consultant has credibility that the Department cannot by definition have. Rather than having an outsider come in and try to build trust, hiring a consultant with the network and credibility created connections in a short period of time that would not otherwise have been possible. This sense of community trust and input was essential to success.

In addition to the success of the event that day, this trust-building and deep engagement has resulted in faith leaders in that community seeking to build a Foster-Care Ministry in South Los Angeles with the major congregations serving the community all committing to being involved.

*Unique Branding, Marketing, and Outreach Key*

Participants and planners noted the importance of the innovative and responsive marketing and outreach of the event. This component can be attributed to RaiseAChild, who used their expertise in marketing and outreach to create the *Fostering Home* brand, including website, logo, materials, and videos. RaiseAChild also coordinated all press outreach for the event, working with the Department's Public Affairs Division to ensure the press release and coverage had approval. RaiseAChild's connections with local radio station KJLH allowed for a generous advertising package and promotional time, including a radio personality broadcasting from the event. RaiseAChild created the website for the event, allowing for online RSVPs. Additionally, RaiseAChild operated a dedicated phone line for this event, taking RSVPs and information exclusively for this event. This allowed for a friendly, personal response whenever an individual called in to RSVP as RaiseAChild answered additional questions and provided event details by phone.

*Experienced Event Management Expertise Ensured Smooth Run of the Day*

The consultant and RaiseAChild handled all event logistics and management, allowing the Department to focus on the substance of the day, rather than the organizational details. RaiseAChild brought in an event specialist who spent the day helping ensure a smooth flow throughout the event. Situations arise in any large event requiring a response and a solution. Having someone skilled in these situations allowed participants to have a good experience.

*Support for the Department in Following Up with Attendees that Did Not Submit an Application*

RaiseAChild tracked RSVPs and collected attendee information, which was then shared, allowing for additional tracking and easier follow-up. RaiseAChild is providing additional capacity in follow up efforts, while the Department follows up with all those who submitted an application. RaiseAChild is connecting with attendees who either did not finish the RFA application or went through an FFA. This continues the conversation with those who would otherwise lose any connection to the event.



*Multiple Orientations May Be Needed*

As discussed above, the demand for the orientation session was greater than anticipated. Future events should offer multiple orientation sessions throughout the day, allowing participants greater flexibility and opportunities to take advantage of this offering. While Spanish language translation services were offered at the initial event, offering a full orientation session in Spanish may be beneficial and generate additional attendees.

*Better Signage, Checklist, and Flow Would Improve Experience*

Future events would benefit from clear signage and direction for guests, with a "check list" of requirements attendees need to complete, noting which can be accomplished at the event. The design of the room could also reflect the necessary steps required to complete the RFA process, with resource fair booths arranged in order of RFA requirement.

**Next Steps**

The *Fostering Home* event was intended to be a model that could then be rolled out to other areas in the County. With its success, not only does the Department seek to have events in other parts of the County but, as discussed below, will seek deeper engagement in South Los Angeles.

**Continued Engagement with Faith Community in South Los Angeles**

An unexpected and welcome result of this event is that faith leaders in South Los Angeles want to build on the momentum of this event and start a Foster Care Ministry that is a network of the five major primarily African-American congregations in South Los Angeles. During the June 3rd event, Elder Joe Paul Jr. from the City of Refuge (a church with over 17,000 members) found event planners to let them know that he was very enthusiastic about what he was experiencing and that he wanted to help bring the community together to build on this momentum. Elder Paul offered to connect the Department with a coalition of the five large predominately African-American churches in South Los Angeles to continue the resource family recruitment efforts started at Center of Hope. Paul's coalition of churches has the potential to reach 120,000 individuals connected to the faith community in this area.

The consultant has brought this group together with Center staff and determined that there is a commitment from the community to move forward. The Department has a meeting scheduled on August 2, 2017, with Elder Paul and representatives from four additional large churches in South Los Angeles to discuss next steps. The City of Refuge would like to host a *Fostering Home* event at its church in mid-fall.

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The continued involvement with the Faith Community in South Los Angeles has the potential to build a network of resource families and supports that will truly serve the children and families in this high-need community.

Additional events throughout the County

Given the success of this event and the potential for continued community engagement, the Department would like to expand the model throughout the County. The *Fostering Home* "one-stop shop" model has proven effective in recruiting new families to the RFA process, engaging the community, and generating excitement and support for the RFA process. The Department sees value in replicating this event and would like to build on this momentum by planning future events in the short and mid-term with one event in each supervisorial district over the next year, including the event currently being discussed with Elder Paul and the City of Refuge.

To do this work successfully, the Department will need to continue to partner with outside consultants, community organizations, the Center, and faith communities. There may be the possibility of a continued engagement with Philanthropy as well.

If you have any questions or need additional information, you may call me or your staff may contact Aldo Marin, DCFS Board Liaison at (213) 351-5530.

BTN:KR:KA:EC

c: Chief Executive Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors